

thing about our country: Every faith is important. In America, people of faith have no corner on compassion, but people of faith need compassion to be true to the call to “*Ame al prójimo como a sí mismo*,” love your neighbor like you’d like to be loved yourself. That’s a universal call.

For Hispanic Americans, a love of neighbor is more than a Gospel command; it’s a way of life. We see the love of neighbor in the strong commitment of Hispanic Americans to family and the culture of life. For Hispanic Americans, families are a source of joy and the foundation of a hopeful society. We’re working to support and defend the sanctity of marriage and to ensure that the most vulnerable Americans are welcomed in life and protected in love.

We see the love of neighbor in the tireless efforts of Hispanic American faith-based and community organizations that work daily to bring hope to harsh places. In Boston, the Leon de Judah congregation mentors inner-city teens so they have a chance to realize the great dreams of America. In St. Louis, Accion Social Comunitaria helps immigrants and their children adapt to American life. In the Archdiocese of Miami, Catholic Charities ministers to people with HIV/AIDS. Inner-city Philadelphia, Cortes runs a fantastic program to help lift the spirits of every single child.

Many in the Hispanic community understand that by serving the least of *nuestros hermanos y hermanas*, that we’re serving a cause greater than ourselves. And by doing so, we’re helping all citizens have an opportunity to realize their dreams here in America.

Finally, we see the love of neighbor in tens of thousands of Hispanics who serve America in the cause of freedom. One of these was an immigrant from Mexico named Rafael Peralta. The day after Rafael got his green card, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. Think about that. While serving in Iraq, this good sergeant wrote a letter to his younger brother. He said, “Be proud of being an American. Our father came to this country, became a citizen because it was the right place for our family to be.” Shortly after writing that letter, Sergeant Peralta used his own body to cover a grenade an enemy soldier had rolled into

a roomful of Marines. This prayer breakfast, we remember the sacrifices of honorable and good folks like Sergeant Peralta, who have shown their love of neighbor by giving their life for freedom.

Hispanic Americans answer the call to service willingly, because you understand that freedom is a divine gift that carries with it serious responsibilities. And as you go about the work of repairing broken lives and bringing love into the pockets of hopelessness and despair, be strong, because you’re sustained by prayer. Through prayer—[*ap- plause*].

One of the most powerful aspects of being the President is to know that millions of people pray for me and Laura, people that I’ll never have a chance—think about a country where millions of people of all faiths, people whom I’ll never have a chance to look face to face with and say, “Thank you,” take time to pray. It really is the strength of America, isn’t it? Through prayer we ask that our hearts be aligned with God’s. Through prayer we ask that we may be given the strength to do what’s right and to help those in need.

I want to thank you for the fine tradition you continue here today. This is an important tradition to continue right here in the heart of the Nation’s Capital. I want to thank you for what you do for our Nation. *Que Dios les bendiga*, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:28 a.m. at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Danny Cortes, senior vice president, and Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr., president and chief executive officer, Esperanza USA; and Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos, wife of President Martin Torrijos Espino of Panama. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on Implementing the Medicare Modernization Act

June 16, 2005

Thank you very much. Please be seated—unless you don’t have a seat. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming. It’s glad—I’m glad to be back to the Department of Health and Human Services. The last time I visited here

was to witness Secretary Leavitt's swearing in. I said I'd be coming back to check up on him. *[Laughter]* I'm back. *[Laughter]* He's doing a fine job; really appreciate your leadership.

I'm grateful to the men and women of this Department for their compassion and service. Thanks for serving our country. I want to thank you all for helping us launch a vital effort to bring greater peace of mind to America's seniors and people with disabilities. Over the next 11 months, we will spread important news to everyone receiving Medicare. This great and trusted program is about to become even better. Starting this November, every American on Medicare can sign up to get help paying for their prescription drugs.

I appreciate Mike Leavitt's understanding of how important it is to spread the news. I also want to thank my friend Mark McClellan for doing such a fine job at the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services. I want to thank you all who work there with him. You've got an important job now. We've passed good law. Now it's important for people to get the news.

I want to thank members of my Cabinet who are here who are going to help spread the news to their Departments, Secretary Elaine Chao, Secretary Alphonso Jackson, Secretary Norm Mineta, Secretary Jim Nicholson. Thank you all for coming, as well as Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart of the Social Security Administration. Welcome. Thank you all for being here.

I appreciate so very much all the other administration officials who are here. I want to thank an old family friend of ours, Dr. Louis Sullivan, former Secretary of HHS, for joining us. Louis, I was looking at that picture up there—*[laughter]*—looks like him. *[Laughter]* Tell me who the painter was—I'd like one to look like me one of these days. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Senator Craig Thomas from Wyoming for joining us. Thank you for being here, Senator. I also want to thank former Senator John Breaux for joining us. I can remember John was one of the leaders in the United States Senate in trying to bring people together to reform Medicare. I want to thank you for your help on this. I want

to thank you for being here. I particularly want to thank the leaders and representatives of the health care, faith-based and community organizations who are all going to help spread the word to our seniors about what is available. I appreciate you being here. I want to thank you for your compassion and your care for America's seniors.

I also want to welcome the Medicare beneficiaries who are here in attendance. Listen carefully, I think you're going to like what you hear.

Forty years ago—think about that, 40 years ago this summer, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, from the great State of Texas—*[laughter]*—signed a law creating Medicare to guarantee health care for seniors and Americans with disabilities. In the decades since that historic act, Medicare has spared millions of our citizens from needless suffering and hardship. Medicare is a landmark achievement of a compassionate society. It is a basic trust that our Government will always honor.

Medicare has also faced challenges. For decades, medicine advanced rapidly and grew to include innovations like prescription drugs, but Medicare didn't keep pace. As a result, Medicare recipients were left with a program based on the medicine of the 1960s. For example, Medicare would pay \$28,000 for ulcer surgery but not \$500 for the prescription drugs that eliminate the cause of most ulcers. Medicare would pay more than \$100,000 to treat the effects of a stroke but not \$1,000 for blood-thinning drugs that could prevent strokes. That's an outdated system, and it made no sense for American seniors. It made no sense for Americans with disabilities, and it made no sense for American taxpayers.

Year after year, politicians pledged to reform Medicare, but the job never got done until 2003, when members of both political parties came together to deliver the greatest advance in health care for seniors since the founding of Medicare. This new law is bringing preventive medicine, better health care choices, and prescription drugs to every American receiving Medicare. The Medicare Modernization Act renewed the promise of

Medicare for the 21st century, and I was honored and proud to sign that piece of legislation.

Over the past year, millions of Americans have started to benefit from the new Medicare program. Every senior entering Medicare is now eligible for a “Welcome to Medicare” physical. It’s a fundamental improvement, and it makes a lot of sense. Medicare patients and doctors are now able to work together to diagnose health care and health concerns right away. And there’s a simple reason: The sooner you diagnose a problem—you can treat problems before they become worse. Medicare now covers preventive screenings that can catch illness from diabetes to heart disease. Medicare is covering innovative programs to help seniors with chronic diseases like high blood pressure. I urge every senior to take advantage of these new benefits in Medicare.

In the 21st century, preventing and treating illness requires prescription drugs. Seniors know this. Yet because Medicare did not cover prescription drugs, many seniors had to make painful sacrifices to pay for medicine. In my travels around the country, I met seniors who faced the agonizing choice between buying prescription drugs and buying groceries. I met retirees who resorted to cutting pills in half. I met Americans who were forced to spend their retirement years working, just to pay for their prescriptions. These hardships undermine the basic promise of Medicare. And thanks to Medicare Modernization Act, those days are coming to an end.

To provide immediate help with drug costs, the new Medicare law created drug discount cards. Over the past year, millions of seniors have used these cards to save billions of dollars. In Missouri, I met a woman who used her discount card to buy \$10 worth of drugs for \$1.14. She was happy with the card. Another senior went to her pharmacy and spent under \$30 for medicine that used to cost about four times as much. And here is what she said: “When he got out my medicine card . . . and told me what the savings was, I about dropped my false teeth.” [Laughter]

The Medicare Modernization Act created a prescription drug benefit to replace drug

discount cards and bring savings and peace of mind to all 42 million Medicare beneficiaries. The new benefit will help every senior as well as Americans with developmental and physical disabilities and mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS. Congress scheduled the prescription drug benefit to start in January of 2006. Thanks to the leadership of Secretary Leavitt and Mark McClellan, we are on track to deliver prescription drug coverage on time to every American senior.

As Medicare’s professional staff prepares to implement the prescription drug benefit, we also must ensure that seniors are ready to take full advantage of their new opportunities. And that’s why I’ve come here today. It’s important for everyone to understand that Medicare prescription drug coverage is voluntary. Seniors can choose to take advantage of the benefit, or they can choose not to. It’s up to them.

And there’s plenty of time to make the decision. Starting on October 1st, Medicare beneficiaries will begin getting information about the new prescription drug plans available. They will receive a handbook called “Medicare and You” that includes detailed information about their options. If they like what they see and choose to get prescription drug coverage, they can enroll anytime between November 15th of this year and May 15th of next year. Beneficiaries should make their decisions as soon as they are ready, because enrolling before May will ensure that they pay the lowest possible premiums.

The Federal Government will work hard to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries understand their options. I’ve asked every agency that touches the lives of seniors or disabled Americans to devote resources to explaining the prescription drug benefit. And we need the help of people in the private sector as well. The only way to reach everyone on Medicare is to mobilize compassionate citizens in communities all over the country. And that’s why we’ve come together this afternoon to kick off a nationwide outreach campaign.

Over the next 11 months, we will unite a wide range of Americans from doctors to nurses to pharmacists to State and local leaders to pharmacists to State and local leaders to faith-based organizations. Together, we

will work to ensure that every American on Medicare is ready to make a confident choice about prescription drug coverage, so they can finally receive the modern health care they deserve.

As we spread the word about the new opportunities in Medicare, we will make it clear that prescription drug coverage will provide greater peace of mind for beneficiaries in three key ways.

First, the new Medicare coverage will provide greater peace of mind by helping all seniors and Americans with disabilities pay for prescription drugs, no matter how they pay for medicine now. On average, Medicare beneficiaries will receive more than \$1,300 in Federal assistance to pay for prescription drugs. Seniors with no drug coverage and average prescription expenses will see their drug bills reduced by half or more. The new Medicare benefits will also provide special help for seniors with the highest drug costs. Starting in January, Medicare will cover 95 percent of all prescription costs after a senior has spent \$3,600 in a year. Seniors will never be able to predict what challenges life will bring, but thanks to Medicare, they can be certain they will never have their entire savings wiped out to pay for prescription drugs.

Second, the new Medicare coverage will provide greater peace of mind by offering beneficiaries better health care choices than they have ever had. Seniors will be able to choose any Medicare prescription drug plan that fits their needs and their medical history. Seniors who want to keep their Medicare the way it is will be able to do so. Seniors using Medicare Advantage to save money will be able to keep their plans and get better drug benefits. Seniors who receive drug coverage from a former employer or union can count on new support from Medicare to help them keep their good benefits. Every prescription drug plan will offer a broad choice of brandname drugs and generic drugs. Seniors will also have the choice to pick up their prescriptions at local pharmacies or to have the medicine delivered to their home.

These options might sound familiar to some of you here at the Department. It's got to sound familiar to Members of the United States Congress. After all, these health care choices, these kind of choices are available

for people who work here in Washington. And if these choices are good enough for people who work here in Washington, they ought to be good enough for the seniors all across the country.

Third, the new Medicare coverage will provide greater peace of mind by extending extra help to low-income seniors and beneficiaries with disabilities. For years, beneficiaries on the tightest budgets received no help from Medicare to pay for prescription drugs. Because we acted, about a third of American seniors will be eligible for a Medicare drug benefit that includes little or no premiums, low deductibles, and no gaps in coverage. On average, Medicare will pick up the tab for more than 95 percent of prescription drug costs for low-income seniors. To receive this important assistance, low-income seniors have to fill out a straightforward, four-page application form with, at most, 16 questions. No financial documents or complicated records are required, and the forms are easy to obtain. In fact, millions of applications have already been mailed to low-income seniors. If you or a family member receives one of these, I urge you to fill it out and send it in. Some of the seniors groups that are here have a saying, "When in doubt, fill it out." [Laughter] By encouraging all low-income seniors to sign up for extra assistance, we will ensure that Medicare gives its greatest help to those with the greatest needs.

With all of these essential reforms, the Medicare Modernization Act created a new commitment to seniors and Americans with disabilities, and all of you are helping to make good on that commitment. By lending a hand to neighbors in need, you are strengthening your communities and showing the great compassion of our country. Many organizations have already launched innovative efforts to reach seniors. And I'll continue to call on people to put forth innovative strategies to reach our seniors.

For example, in Wisconsin and Indiana, more than 270 community leaders are coming together to find ways to get information to rural seniors. In Chicago, a food pantry, the Catholic Archdiocese, and a news publication are all working to get the word out

about the new Medicare benefits. The Federal Department of Transportation, under the leadership of Norm Mineta, is working with local agencies to post Medicare information in buses and at highway rest stops. Thousands of pharmacies are working with Medicare to provide information for seniors. Countless other organizations are holding community events and connecting with seniors face to face, so Medicare recipients can get their questions answered and make informed choices about prescription drug coverage. In other words, we're on a massive education effort, starting today. And I'm asking for America's help.

You can help by making a call to your mother or father and tell them what's available. You can help by showing an older neighbor how to fill out a form. You can help by spending an afternoon at the local retirement home. And by the way, when you help somebody, you're really helping yourself. You can get information 24 hours a day calling 1-800-MEDICARE. It's pretty easy to remember, 1-800-MEDICARE. Or you can use the Internet to visit the official Medicare web site at medicare.gov. All you've got to do is type in medicare.gov, and you're going to find out what I'm talking about.

Remember that information about prescription drug plans will be available starting October 1st, and November 15th is the first day to sign up for the new coverage. You need to circle those dates on your calendar and tell the seniors in your life that modern medicine is on the way. This is a good deal, and people need to take advantage of it.

I think the passage of the Medicare Modernization Act is a good lesson for all of us who work in this city. You know, it wasn't all that long ago the leaders who talked about Medicare reform faced a lot of name-calling—to say the least. When Congress finally rose above politics and fulfilled its duty to America's seniors, it showed what's possible in Washington, DC. We need that same spirit—[*applause*]. I mean, this bill is proof that Americans really aren't interested in seeing one party win and another party lose. What Americans want to see is people coming together to solve problems. That's what they want to see.

We had a problem in Medicare. It wasn't working the way it should. It wasn't modern. It wasn't answering the needs of our seniors. And by coming together, we have done our job here in Washington. And as a result of working together, we have changed Medicare for the better. Medicare is now modern, reformed, and compassionate. And I urge all seniors—all seniors and those folks here in America who want to help seniors, look into this new prescription drug benefit; it will make your life better.

Thank you all for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:22 p.m. at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Statement on the Presidential Elections in Iran

June 16, 2005

In recent months, the cause of freedom has made enormous gains in the broader Middle East. Millions of people in Afghanistan and Iraq defied terrorists to cast their ballots in free elections. Palestinians voted for a new President who rejects violence and is working for democratic reform, and the people of Lebanon reclaimed their sovereignty and are now voting for new leadership. Across the Middle East, hopeful change is taking place. People are claiming their liberty. And as a tide of freedom sweeps this region, it will also come eventually to Iran.

The Iranian people are heirs to a great civilization—and they deserve a Government that honors their ideals and unleashes their talent and creativity. Today, Iran is ruled by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world. Power is in the hands of an unelected few who have retained power through an electoral process that ignores the basic requirements of democracy.

The June 17th Presidential elections are sadly consistent with this oppressive record. Iran's rulers denied more than a thousand people who put themselves forward as candidates, including popular reformers and women who have done so much for the cause of freedom and democracy in Iran.

The Iranian people deserve a genuinely democratic system in which elections are